

# How Can I Be Involved in My Child's Education?

*By Lynn Liantos*

Research studies consistently reveal that high student achievement and self-esteem are closely related to positive parental participation in education. Parents and schools need to work together so all children can succeed in school.

Almost everyone agrees that parents are, after all, their children's first and most important teachers. You, as a parent, have important knowledge about your child's likes, dislikes, needs, and problems that the school may not be aware of. You may also have ideas for improving your child's school. But even though studies show that most parents want to be involved in their children's education, they may not be exactly sure how to go about it, especially if—like most parents—they work during the school day.

Parents often ask the following questions:

## **What Can I Do to Involve Myself with My Child's School?**

Some schools value parent involvement by providing numerous opportunities for parents to interact with each other, with teachers, and with students. Your child's school can provide ideas on how to participate. One important way you can become involved in your child's schooling is to exercise any choices available in the selection of coursework, programs, or even schools. Many schools are moving toward "school-based management," in which administrators share the responsibility for operating schools with teachers, students, parents, and community members. You can become involved in committees that govern your child's school or join the local parent-teacher association.

The National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE) says that schools should regularly communicate with parents about their child's progress and the educational objectives of the school. This communication should also

include non-custodial parents, stepparents, and any other adults, such as grandparents, who are responsible for the child. If you aren't receiving such information, ask for it. Work with other parents and guardians to be sure that the school understands how best to keep you informed.

Some schools send newsletters and calendars home regularly, alerting parents to school functions and ways they can participate. Encourage your school to provide volunteer opportunities for working parents and to schedule some school events outside of the school day to increase participation.

## **Here Are Other Ideas:**

- Visit your child's classroom. A visit will give you an idea of what your child does at school and how he or she interacts with other children.
- Volunteer to help in the classroom as an assistant (listening to children read, for example, or serving as an aide during computer work).
- Support student events and performances by helping with them (such as sewing costumes or painting scenery for a school play) and by attending them.
- If your school has a parents' room/lounge or parent center, drop in to meet other parents and teachers there, or to pick up information and materials.
- Participate in workshops that are offered, such as those on child development or concerns that parents have (or help plan such workshops).
- Take advantage of parent-teacher contracts (perhaps agreeing to read with your child for a certain amount of time each night).
- Ask your child's teacher if he or she has materials that you can use to help your child at home and to supplement homework.

- Be part of decision-making committees about school issues and problems, such as a Parent Advisory Committee.

### **How Can I Help My Child with Homework?**

Most teachers assign homework on a regular basis because practice is needed before children fully understand new skills or concepts. Homework also increases the amount of learning time available and allows students to do more in-depth learning.

#### **Here Are Some General Guidelines for Helping with Homework:**

- Reward progress, use lots of praise, and display good work.
- Find out how much and what type of homework is assigned in each class, how students are expected to prepare it and turn it in, and what students can do when they don't understand something; help your child manage the workload by dividing it into smaller tasks.
- Help your child develop a homework schedule that he or she can stick to.
- Talk to your child each day about homework assignments; go over work; see if it's complete; and ask questions about it. But don't do your child's homework yourself.
- Provide a suitable place for study (if possible, make it quiet and away from the distractions of TV, phone, and loud music).
- Avoid making homework a punishment.

#### **How Can I Make Our Home a Good Place for My Child to Learn?**

- Have high expectations for your child's learning and behavior, both at home and at school.
- Praise and encourage your child.
- Emphasize effort and achievement, and be a role model for getting work done before play.
- Establish rules and routines in the home.

- Monitor television viewing.
- Limit after-school jobs and activities.
- Encourage your child to share information about school and respond with empathy.
- If you don't do anything else, read to your young child or have him or her read to you every night. Encourage older children to read by reading yourself and by having interesting and appropriate materials available.

### **What Should I Do If My Child Isn't Doing Well in School?**

Contact your child's teacher. Don't wait for the school to contact you. It's important to resolve problems as soon as possible when they occur. When parents work with teachers, they are often able to improve a child's performance in school. Children also get the sense that education is really important when they see their parents involved with their teachers and their school. Parents feel a sense of accomplishment, too, when they help their children succeed in school. Ask your child's teacher for specific activities you can do at home with your child and help the teacher better understand what works best with your child. Make it clear that if the teacher sees a problem developing, you want to hear about it immediately. Then, meet with your child's teacher frequently until the problem is resolved.

### **What If My Child Doesn't like School?**

Using your unique knowledge of your child, try to find out why he or she seems unhappy with school. Observe and listen to your child. The problem may not lie with school itself, but with peers or friends. It may also be a family problem or an issue of self-esteem. Arrange for a conference with the teacher or school counselor. Work toward being able to discuss problems with your child openly, and listen carefully to his or her views before you offer any solutions.

Children whose parents are involved in their education have better grades, a more positive attitude toward school, and more appropriate

school behavior than those with less involved parents. So don't underestimate what YOU, as a parent, can contribute to your child's learning experiences, no matter how much education you have yourself. Getting involved in your child's education WILL make a difference.

### **Resource Organizations for Parental Involvement**

Center for Social Organization of Schools  
Johns Hopkins University  
3505 North Charles Street  
Baltimore, MD 21218  
(301) 338-7570

National Coalition for Parent Involvement In Education  
Box 39  
1201 16th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20036

National Committee for Citizens in Education  
10840 Little Patuxent Parkway, #301  
Columbia, MD 21044-3199  
(301) 977-9300

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) operates 16 clearinghouses specializing in education topics. For information call 1 (800) USE-ERIC.

For more information on this subject, contact:

ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management  
University of Oregon  
1787 Agate Street  
Eugene, OR 97403-5207  
(503) 346-5043

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### **Sources**

Most of the following references—those identified with an ED or EJ number—have been abstracted and are in the ERIC database. The journal articles should be available at most research libraries. For a list of ERIC collections in your area, contact ACCESS ERIC at 1 (800) USE-ERIC.

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